

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 7, 2021

The Honorable Merrick B. Garland
United States Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, D.C., 20530

Dear Attorney General Garland:

The incessant and coordinated attempts to nullify the votes of millions of Black citizens in future elections through the introduction of voter suppression legislation in more than 40 states represents a dangerous conspiracy that threatens the very existence of our democracy and demands your immediate attention. These initiatives are near universally coupled with persistent lies about voter fraud despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

We request that you determine if there have been violations of both criminal and civil laws entrusted to your department to enforce. These laws, prohibiting intimidation and interference with the right to vote, were fought for by voting rights and civil rights activists, from Reconstruction through the Civil Rights Movement, who often paid with their own blood if not their lives. These are the laws that are now under attack. Unfortunately, the recent anti-democratic messages couched in lies of voter fraud or phantom illegal votes are reminiscent of a time in our nation's history when our Justice system ignored similarly coordinated attacks, rooted in racism, on the participation of certain Americans. From the tragic abuses of the Jim Crow era after violent attacks on Black voters in the South in the 1870s, to political assassinations and the deaths of four little girls in an Alabama Church, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, the current efforts present a very real and dangerous threat to our democracy.

Today, however, the United States Congress counts among its members an unprecedented 26 African- American women who are committed to forging a bright future for America informed by the mistakes of its past. We are committed to using our political power to ensure that history does not repeat itself. The activism of Black women resulted in an unprecedented voter turnout in the 2020 election, and as a result, legislators in more than 40 states have introduced voter suppression legislation designed to diminish voter registration timelines, limit the availability of vote by mail and accessibility of early vote opportunities.

This legislative agenda, which President Biden has correctly called "Jim Crow in the 21st Century," is supported by a chorus of messengers in the media who are committed to spreading misinformation and lies to give the impression that these voter restrictions are justified. As legislators we are committed to holding hearings, posing questions and initiating reports to expose this conspiratorial plot aimed at undermining our democracy and influencing the direction of public policy. As the nation's chief law enforcement officer, we ask you to similarly commit to investigating when actions to intimidate Black voters occur and if purported

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legislation has crossed into criminal activity under our laws, with the aim of preserving our democracy and preventing a return to the intimidation tactics of past generations.

President Lyndon Baines Johnson said, "The vote is the most powerful instrument ever devised by man for breaking down injustice." As legislators we understand that there is no greater threat to our participation as citizens, than our right to vote. African Americans have a long tradition of fighting against barriers to the Black vote that includes the elimination of the poll tax and literacy tests. However, this latest organized effort to disenfranchise voters is not just a threat to Black electoral participation, it is a threat to democracy and as such should be of great concern to the Department of Justice.

Sincerely,



BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN
Member of Congress

/s/
KAREN BASS
Member of Congress

/s/
ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON
Member of Congress

/s/
TERRI A. SEWELL
Member of Congress

/s/
BARBARA LEE
Member of Congress

/s/
YVETTE D. CLARKE
Member of Congress

/s/
AYANNA PRESSLEY
Member of Congress

/s/
ILHAN OMAR
Member of Congress

/s/
NIKEMA WILLIAMS
Member of Congress

/s/
MARILYN STRICKLAND
Member of Congress

/s/
CORI BUSH
Member of Congress